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ABSTRACT

The paper describes the background and development of The Residential Facilities Worker Training Program, a 2-year degree program at Seattle Community College (Washington) to train staff persons to work in community based residential settings with developmentally disabled children, adolescents, and adults. Need for the program is discussed, certification efforts are reviewed, and the program's training design is described for five areas of competence: relevant background knowledge, interpersonal skills, remedial teaching skills, performance of observations, and performance of duties in supervised settings. The 2-year curriculum is summarized in terms of required courses, class hours, and credit hours. Among findings drawn from four quarters of the program's operation are that the students are already employed in the field of developmental disabilities, and are employed in a wide variety of settings. Future changes are noted. (CL)

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"TRAINING PARAPROFESSIONALS TO WORK IN RESIDENTIAL SETTINGS WITH THE DEVELOPMENTALLY DISABLED"

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I. THE BEGINNINGS

The Residential Facilities Worker (RFW) Training Program is a two-year degree program being conducted by the Home and Family Education Division of North Seattle Community College in Seattle, Washington. Its purpose is to train staff persons to work in community-based residential settings with developmentally disabled children, adolescents, and adults.

The program was designed in 1976 as an outgrowth of the nationwide movement to reduce the number of developmentally disabled persons living in large state institutions. This has been accomplished by moving as many persons as possible into appropriate living situations within the community. In Washington State these living situations range in size from relatively large "skilled nursing facilities" or "congregate care facilities" which may house from 50-100 persons, to small "group homes" of 6-20 persons. The RFW curriculum was designed to teach the knowledge and skills needed within the entire range of community residential facilities, although particular emphasis was placed upon the group home setting. It was anticipated that the greatest number of students would come from such small residential settings.

We felt there were several compelling factors which underscored the need to begin such training on a community college level, and specifically within our division. First, a survey of group homes, conducted in 1975-76, showed that most group home staff persons had no prior training in the field, 45% had no training whatsoever beyond high school, and the mean educational level was 13.50 years. When one compared the lack of training with the range of responsibilities expected of group home staff, the need for such a training program became acutely apparent. For example, a staff person could easily perform all of the following duties in the course of a typical working day: attending to the health and grooming needs of the residents, meal planning and preparation, shopping, transporting residents, house maintenance, supervising resident's performance of daily chores, teaching residents specific skills (money management for example), counseling with residents concerning personal problems, planning and supervising group activities, and talking with an upset parent or an irate neighbor. Secondly, the need for such training was timely, since an effort to develop a statewide certification process for group home staff - with a commensurate raising of their minimum-level wates - was beginning at the same time. The certification process

and our training effort were clearly complementary processes. Finally, we felt that we had the expertise and experience appropriate to designing and implementing such a training program within our division, because since 1973 we had been conducting two similar programs - an Early Childhood Special Education training program, and a Youth Worker training program. Not only were several of the content areas of these programs similar to the proposed RFW curriculum, but the competency-based training model employed in these programs seemed well suited to the new program as well.

Thus, during Spring Quarter 1976, a list of proposed competencies for the RFW program was compiled, and several professionals from the community with expertise in the field of residential facilities for the developmentally disabled were asked to critique the list. With these critiques in hand, three instructors from our division rewrote the competencies and designed a two-year curriculum to teach them. In September 1976, a grant was submitted to the Bureau of Education for the Handicapped (BEH) requesting support to implement the RFW program on a pre-service and in-service basis during Fall Quarter 1977. The grant was approved in June of 1977. We did some final curriculum revision and conducted publicity efforts during Fall Quarter 1977, and began offering courses on a full-scale basis in January 1978.

II. THE TRAINING DESIGN

There are five general areas of competence which form the core of the training program, and around which the curriculum is structured. These areas of competence are described below:

1) Relevant Background Knowledge: The student should be knowledgeable about "normal" human development as well as the variety and extent of handicapping conditions that can impinge upon normal development. Likewise, it is necessary to be familiar with basic nutritional needs and first aid practices. The student should have knowledge about the general purpose and operation of residential facilities, what social conditions prevail in the community, and the social services available for residents. In most cases, knowledge of manual communication would be necessary; in all cases, students should be knowledgeable about the rights and responsibilities of the residents.

2) Interpersonal Skills: The student needs to be able to establish and maintain a variety of healthy, productive, and long-term relations with the residents. Human relations skills are clearly essential to accomplish this, but they are equally as important in order to work effectively with the families of the residents, other staff persons, administrators, other community agencies, etc. A knowledge of group dynamics is necessary to work with the residents in group settings, and to teach them the advantages of living and working with others. Furthermore, such skills would enable the student to function effectively as part of the staff team.

3) Remedial Teaching Skills: Students should be thoroughly knowledgeable and proficient in the use of teaching skills which will 1) eliminate problem behaviors: tardiness at work, belligerent behavior, excessive withdrawal, etc. and 2) teach new skills: personal grooming, money management, constructive use of leisure time, etc. In fact, such remedial teaching skills could well be considered the core group of competencies around which the others revolve.

4) Performance of Observations: Students need to become skilled and systematic observers of what actually occurs in residential facilities - with individual residents, between residents, between staff and residents, etc. With such skills, they will not only become familiar with the various operations within the facility, but also will begin to understand these operations. Ultimately, it is this understanding which will provide the basis for effective functioning as a residential facilities worker.

5) Performance of Duties in Supervised Settings: It is essential that students have the experience of actually performing the role of a residential facilities worker in a real-life setting and putting into practice the competencies they have gained throughout the course of the training program. The supervision of instructional and on-site professional staff will provide the student with the valuable opportunity to critique his/her performance and make adjustments to improve its quality. Upon completion of this competency area, the student should be fully capable of functioning as a residential facilities worker.

These competency areas provide the basis for the two-year curriculum, which is summarized in the following schema.

	COURSE NO.	REQUIRED COURSES Suggested Sequence	CLASS HOURS	LAB/ CLIN. HOURS	CREDIT HOURS	TOTAL CREDIT
1st Qtr.	CCE 101	Intro. to Human Development	5	0	5	
	EDH 122	Intro. to Social Agencies	4	0	4	
	EDH 141	Interpersonal Skills with the Developmentally Disabled	1	2	2	
	CCE 118	Basic Helping Skills I	3	0	3	14
2nd Qtr.	EDH 149	Methods of Observation and Record Keeping in a Residential Facility	2	6	4	
	EDH 113	Intro. to Handicapping Conditions	4	0	4	
	PSY 110	General Psychology	5	0	5	
	CCE 115	First Aid and Safety	2	0	2	15
3rd Qtr.	CCE 206	Adolescent Development	5	0	5	
	ENG 101	English Composition	5	0	5	
	EDH 170	Beginning Sign	2	0	2	
	REC 205	Recreation for Special Populations	2	3	3	15
4th Qtr.	PSY 210	Personality and Individual Differences	5	0	5	
	EDH 171	Intermediate Sign	2	0	2	
	CCE 230	Dynamics of Family Culture and Relationships	5	0	5	
	EDH 259	Behavior Management	3	0	3	15
5th Qtr.	SOC 110	Survey of Sociology	5	0	5	
	EDH 249	Developing Independent Living	3	0	3	
	CCE 233	Understanding Human Sexuality	3	0	3	
	SCI 180	Ascent of Man (or equivalent)	5	0	5	16
6th Qtr.	EDH 243	Residential Practicum	2	21	9	
	EDH 260	Responsive Teaching	3	0	3	
	HIS 115	America in the 20th Century (or equivalent)	5	0	5	17
		TOTAL REQUIRED COURSES				92
		TOTAL CREDIT HOURS				92

III. OUR EXPERIENCE

In the four quarters the training program has been in operation (from January 1978 through June 1979, excluding Summer Quarter 1978) we have offered a total of 29 classes and 8 workshops which have attracted a total enrollment of 375 students. Approximately 60% of these students finished the courses or workshops which they began. There are several things which we have learned from our experience thus far.

1. THE STUDENTS ARE ALREADY EMPLOYED IN THE FIELD OF DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES. Over 90% of all the students who have taken part in the training are already working with the developmentally disabled. Thus the program is serving almost exclusively as an in-service training program and hardly at all as a pre-service program. It seems that this trend is likely to persist as long as entry level positions in residential settings for the developmentally disabled continue to require no prior training or experience.

2. THE STUDENTS ARE EMPLOYED IN A WIDE VARIETY OF SETTINGS. We had anticipated that most of the already-employed students would come from group home settings. As has happened, about 1/3 represent group homes, 1/3 are staff persons from a local state institution for the developmentally disabled, and 1/3 are from other types of community settings - both residential and non-residential. Thus students are dealing with a wider range of disabilities than we had anticipated, which has caused some modification of the proposed curriculum.

3. THE STUDENTS EXHIBIT DIFFERENT PATTERNS OF ENROLLMENT. Students who come from community-based residential settings are primarily interested in classes that have highly apparent and immediate applicability to their work situation, and that are offered within a short time frame - a workshop of three half-days, for example. Thus they are very selective about the courses they take, and very few are interested in the two-year degree nature of the program. The institution-based students, on the other hand, form the cadre of the degree-pursuing students. When one considers that for the institution workers, further education relates directly to career advancement, whereas for the community-based staff persons there is no such correlation, this phenomenon becomes understandable.

IV. THE FUTURE

We are considering various changes as the program begins its second full year of operation.

1. REGARDING TRAINING FOR INSTITUTION STAFF PERSONS.
   Washington State institutions for the developmentally disabled are considering requiring a two-year degree of their resident care and training staff. If this consideration becomes a reality, then the RFW program would likely form the basis for such a training effort within the Seattle area. If the focus of the training program shifts toward institutionalized residents, several curriculum alterations would be indicated. Course emphasis would necessarily shift toward more intensified training in behavioral management, task analysis, and self-help skill training, communication with non-verbal residents, handling of physically disabled residents, and so forth.

2. REGARDING TRAINING FOR GROUP HOME STAFF.
   The effort to develop certification standards for group home staff persons, which was mentioned earlier, is receiving increased recognition and support at the state level. If this process and its corresponding raise in salaries of group home workers is approved by the Washington State Legislature, our program would receive the impetus it needs to continue training in this area.

3. REGARDING "TAILOR-MADE" WORKSHOP TRAINING.
   Some of the workshops we have conducted have been short-term, in-service training sessions designed to meet the specific training needs of a particular agency, and have been conducted in the agency setting. This effort has met with considerable success, and is likely to continue.

V. CONCLUSION

We feel that the RFW training program represents an important beginning response to a critical training need. It is hoped that by sharing the materials which we have developed, and the experiences we have had, others might build upon our efforts. If more detailed information is desired, it is readily available by contacting the author.